

Committee on Resources

Subcommittee on Fisheries Conservation, Wildlife and Oceans

Witness Statement

Statement by

Rep. Randy "Duke" Cunningham

before the

Resources Subcommittee on Fisheries, Wildlife and Ocean Conservation

on H.Con. Res 189, the

Shark Conservation and Finning Prohibition Resolution

Thursday, October 21, 1999 at 10:00 a.m.

1334 Longworth House Office Building

Chairman Saxton, Ranking Member Faleomavaega, Members of the Subcommittee, I want to thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today. I introduced H. Con. Res 189 to send a clear message to ban the wasteful, unsportsmanlike and destructive practice of shark finning in the American waters of the Central and Western Pacific.

Shark finning is the practice of removing of a shark's fins and discarding the carcass into the sea. As an avid sportsman, and a previous co-chairman of the Congressional Sportsmen's Caucus, I find this practice horrific.

Shark finning is occurring in the U.S. Pacific and increasing at an alarming rate. According to the National Marine Fisheries Service, in the Central and Western Pacific fishery the number of sharks finned has risen from 2,289 in 1991, to 60,857 in 1998. The most troubling fact in these statistics is that 98.7% of these sharks are taken just for their fins.

To stop this practice, the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) has decided to ban shark finning in all federal waters of the U.S. Atlantic, Gulf of Mexico and Caribbean.

NMFS has also written to the Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council (WestPac) stating, "finning is wasteful and should be stopped." However, in June of this year, when given the opportunity to stop finning, WestPac balked and took no action.

Mr. Chairman, the resolution before you today expresses the sense of Congress that we disagree with the

failure of the Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council and the NMFS to halt shark finning, and urges the Council to prohibit the practice immediately. It sends a clear message that Congress does not tolerate the continued practice of shark finning in the Central and Western Pacific.

The resolution also recognizes that the United States has emerged as global leader in shark fisheries management. For that reason, my resolution calls on the Secretary of State to continue to advocate for the coordinated management of sharks and the eventual elimination of shark finning in all waters of the world. Yet, as Ms. Sonya Fordham of the Center for Marine Conservation notes, "our inability to address an egregious finning problem within our own waters threatens to undermine the U.S. role in these important international initiatives."

Mr. Chairman, the resolution I have introduced has broad bipartisan support. It is strongly supported by the Ocean Wildlife Campaign, a coalition that includes the Center for Marine Conservation, National Audubon Society, National Coalition for Marine Conservation, Natural Resources Defense Council, Wildlife Conservation Society, and the World Wildlife Fund. In addition, it is supported by the State of Hawaii Office of Hawaiian Affairs, the American Sportfishing Association, the Recreational Fishing Alliance, the Sportfishing Association of California, the Cousteau Society, the Center for Marine Conservation, and the Western Pacific Fisheries Coalition. I submit for the record several letters of support from these organizations.

Mr. Chairman, I want to close by quoting The Honorable Mike Hayden of the American Sportfishing Association, who said, "For far too long, we have neglected to take action to stop this most unsportsmanlike fishing activity. Your effort to ban finning will not only benefit depressed shark populations, but many other species of commercially and recreationally important fish."

Mr. Chairman, I ask that the Committee pass this important resolution. Our prompt action will halt the rampant waste resulting from shark finning. Thank you for holding this hearing and I look forward to working with you to conserve our ocean resources.

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